

Minutes of the Human Rights Commission meeting  
February 16, 2022

**Commissioners present:** Booker Bush, Deidre Cuffee-Gray, Susan MacDonald, Megan Paik  
**Guest:** Lisa Downing

Meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m. There was no public comment.

The minutes of January 2022 were approved with one abstention by Commissioner Bush who was not present in that meeting.

Director of Forbes Library, Lisa Downing considered the panel discussion of February 9 to be a success. Appr. 80 registered; registration to attendance rate was great with at least 60 at the meeting. Recording with related links were sent to registrants; it is also posted to the library's YouTube channel. The Senior Center wishes to partner with Forbes to post local content there. Panelists were pleased with engagement and turnout. Carolyn Misch came through as a last-minute speaker and was invaluable in answering questions about zoning. Panelists were skilled in making housing topic accessible; attendees were engaged on the chat, and Q&A was extended a few minutes. Several people showed up at the library for the program, and the staff assisted them in zooming in.

Commissioner Paik thought the program was tight and well-run. The information about housing development was provided at an approachable, introductory level for non-practitioners. Chat questions were responded to efficiently. A great compliment paid by the panelists was that they learned new things from each other. She liked seeing the visuals with Keith Fairey and Jessica Bossie's presentations and thought Pam Schwartz's talk could have been enhanced by a concurrent slide with the list of links in addition to posting them into the chat after she spoke. The feedback she received was an ask to see links of "how to directly donate" during the presentations.

Dir. Downing said that the ability of zoom to allow for followups is valuable. She will send one email with additional content to participants, including a link to the city's planning page which will address many questions regarding zoning. Another link is the one to the library's virtual exhibit. Commissioner Cuffey-Gray suggested sharing a link to CHAPA's affordable housing sessions, which are very comprehensive. Commissioner Paik asked about the status of the virtual exhibit. Dir. Downing said there is a fair number of submissions after a concerted effort to draw from a broader audience. It was worthwhile to build these relationships for submissions to in-person shows in the Fall. A broad range of multimedia art was solicited. Commissioner Paik asked whether the panelists had recommended topics or speakers for subsequent housing programs. Dir. Downing said that Pam Schwartz would have the best idea.

Commissioner Bush suggested that the planning members meet with Sean Donovan, the implementation director of Community Care. He would like to look deeper at the topic of reparations, in particular the impact on housing. Nationally, there have been recommendations on vouchers and discussions of history of how people have lost housing. He thought well of the program and wished the links were more available to viewers who could not access the chat. He also missed the real time interactions. Dir. Downing said that “tax credit for homeowners” was another suggestion for future programming. April is probably the earliest for the next program; a few months between programs is not too long. There is a possibility of a hybrid event with attendees in person as well. The Coolidge Museum seats 75 at full capacity.

Commissioner Paik asked if successive programs could be on narrower topics but still appropriate for the general public; she agreed that Sean Donovan should be asked to join discussions re housing in Northampton. Commissioner Bush mentioned that a group of BIPOCs are trying to figure out their relationship with other local groups who are addressing similar housing-as-reparations issues. Commissioner Cuffey-Gray also viewed a documentary that uncovered the history of Seneca Village, where Central Park is today. Dir. Downing mentioned that Northampton archives will shed light on housing stories in the city. Commissioner Bush said that housing is a racialized issue but also a universal one; it is a big deal for everyone at the moment. Sean Donovan is one person that approaches the housing need from the perspective of those seeking the housing. He asked about any themes in the questions in the panel zoom chat. Dir. Downing’s impression was that the city should be intentional about parcels that could be housing opportunities and planning for everyone to afford living in the city. The commissioners thanked her for her time.

A number of new applicants are in the pipeline for nomination by the mayor’s office. The City Services committee does not have those names on the agenda for their first (organizing) meeting this month, but they may not have yet started the work of recommending new members of commissions and boards. Commissioner MacDonald asked whether members needed to be residents of Northampton around the year. The commissioners expressed interest in having additional Smith students join. Commissioner Paik suggested also that commissioners offer public comment about the [resolution](#) to be voted on the following day in Council. Commissioner Bush will make an appearance to share his experiences on the policing review commission, which lost a number of BIPOC members who faced socioeconomic, gendered, and cultural challenges to staying on the six-month board. The commissioners agreed to discuss the possible change to meeting format in March. Commissioner Cuffey-Gray also invited other members to join her in the AFSC sessions about “alternatives to police response” each Saturday until June.

Commissioner Cuffey-Gray moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Bush at 7:36 p.m.